

A Short Visit to the American Artillery

BY CAPTAIN W. G. H. PIKE, R.A.

Through the courtesy of the author (now with an antitank battery at Aldershot) and the *Journal of the Royal Artillery*, in which the article recently appeared, we present some extracts from a most interesting survey made by a fellow gunner of the British forces. The article was written before the recent reorganization of the Royal Regiment of Artillery took place.

AN ambition to see both America and the American army decided me to apply for a short attachment to the latter during my summer leave. The British Military attaché at Washington arranged this with the U. S. War Department and for their kindness and assistance my grateful thanks are due.

I was sent to the 7th Field Artillery Regiment, stationed at Fort Ethan Allen, near Lake Champlain in Vermont. The country in this part of America is not only magnificent from the point of view of scenery but it is also of great historic interest. It was the scene of all the great wars for supremacy in North America, and places such as Crown Point, Ticonderoga and Saratoga are beautifully kept up with memorials to the great men and famous regiments of all countries. French, British and American soldiers lie side by side and worthy tributes to the gallantry and achievements of them all are recorded without respect to race or creed.

THE SPIRIT OF "AMERICANISM"

Before being able to understand anything American, it is essential to try and understand the great underlying spirit which pervades Americans of every class and creed. Everywhere and amongst all people, there is to be found a wonderful spirit of freedom and equality. It is far more psychological than actual, for the divergence between rich and poor is probably as great, if not greater, than in any other civilized country. But in

every class of society an American has a feeling of social equality; he can throw out his chest and believe that he belongs to a race where all men are born free and equal, and where he will be treated for what he is, regardless of birth. Our class system with its privileged classes and public schools is not generally admired, and it is considered that a child in America has more chance of rising, and being treated, on his merits.

It is impossible to generalise on the people of a nation springing from so many different sources and in the process of nation building, but the deepest impression left after a short visit is that of their generous mindedness. They appear to be always ready to see the best points in other people, whilst being keenly critical of themselves. This remarkable attribute is more pronounced than their traditional hospitality and, as an Englishman, a visitor will find a tremendously warm appreciation and regard for Great Britain and the British Empire. The difficulties of the former in the complicated situation of the world today are fully realized, and there is the utmost sympathy for our efforts which are generally considered to be guided by true and upright principles, such as are admired and advocated by Americans themselves. This feeling, however, does not generally go to the extent of wishing to adopt a policy of active support. It is impossible to gauge the trend of public opinion in the event of war, and it would be

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largely guided by circumstances. A great section of the population would undoubtedly wish to support Great Britain, but an even larger section would almost certainly be against anything but strict neutrality. There is a very general feeling that America was "sold a pup" in the last war, and came out of it with few thanks, much abuse and many bad debts. The private arms manufacturers made good money, but the country as a whole gained nothing. Any form of intervention is extremely unlikely though I could not help getting the feeling that America would not, in the long run, be willing to see Great Britain sink.

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PUBLIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ARMY

The absence of any immediate danger of invasion has resulted in a public attitude of indifference to the state of readiness for war of the American Army. The state of re-armament and the trend of tactical thought in the army seem to be behind that of other great powers, and it would probably take the best part of two years before America could equip and train a large army to take the field. This does not, however, mean a lack of public interest in the army. The navy, and the air branches of the army and navy have better propaganda than the army, but the latter is far ahead of us in that respect. The cinema, as will be seen later, has a great effect on enlistment and the public are encouraged to visit the army under all conditions. For instance, a regiment in camp may have a continual stream of civilians walking round its lines, seeing its men, animals and machines. The officers and men enjoy their company and there is a general feeling of good comradeship that results in a close touch between soldier and civilian.

OFFICERS

Officers come from all classes, though the majority are from the middle classes. The tradition of father to son is not as prevalent as with us, but it is on the increase and produces a fine type. The material amongst the officers is excellent, and there appeared to be a really good feeling between officers and men.

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There is in other ways, however, rather less touch between officers and men than in our army. The average young officer in the artillery, for instance, has no executive command and did not appear to know very much about the men in his battery. He was not father and mother to them in the same sense as the British subaltern; he is not allowed to play games with them, and he is usually married within a year or two of being commissioned. This somewhat naturally transfers much of his time and interest elsewhere than to his unit!

In striking contrast to this lack of formality between officers and men, there are considerable barriers of rank amongst the officers themselves. This is due to a variety of reasons. In the first place, there is an almost entire absence of mess life. The officers' mess merely consists of one dining room where members have their meals at set places. There is an officers' club at every station, but this did not appear to be used a great deal. Bachelors thus tend to keep closely to friends of their own age and interests, and there is little vertical interchange of sociability and ideas. Officers, moreover, get married at a much earlier age than in the British Army. A great number marry the day they leave West Point, and it is most unusual to find a bachelor with more than a few years service. The training at West Point

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also probably has considerable effect. Cadets here are kept for four years under a far stricter discipline than at the Shop or Sandhurst and great emphasis is laid on rank and seniority. For his first year, a cadet is as near an untouchable outcaste as it is possible to find outside India. West Point undoubtedly turns out a fine specimen of young men, physically and mentally: above all it inculcates a wonderful sense of honour and esprit de corps. But it seems to do this largely at the expense of individuality and officers derived from other sources had, on the whole, a broader outlook and more intelligence.

N.C.OS, AND MEN

Both mentally and physically the United States Army enlists a very fine type of man. Their physique is first class and their education and intelligence are considerably superior to that of the enlisted British soldier. There is no army educational system as in the British Army: it is unnecessary and by comparison shows the great superiority of American over British primary education. With few exceptions, all American children are educated at the government high schools, with a consequent levelling up of classes, of education and of opportunities for advancement to the child of merit. The only education in the American Army is entirely technical.

There is apparently little difficulty in obtaining sufficient recruits and as the mentality of the American and British soldier are similar, it is interesting to compare their conditions of service. The American soldier is paid better, though by comparison with outside wages, not a great deal better than the British soldier. His feeding is excellent: in quantity and quality it is first-class and it is quite unnecessary for the soldier ever to have to

pay for extra food out of his pay. The cooks are specially selected men and they receive special rates of pay. At Fort Ethan Allen the feeding was actually better than in the officers' mess! The barracks and recreation rooms are considerably better and more comfortably furnished than in the British Army, and there is more freedom for the soldier when off duty. His spare time is his own and he can go and do more or less what he likes, and in whatever clothes he likes, when not actually on duty. Games are well run and are less centralized than in the British Army: distance makes a network of inter-unit competition difficult, and the result is that more men play and less attention is given to teams of the regimental gladiators. There is no organization similar to our army sports' board with centralized control, and the same applies to a lesser extent to physical training. The saving in overhead expenses, office work and personnel in the departments of education, games and physical training must be considerable and, in the case of games at least, means that far more men get healthy exercise.

On the whole the American soldier has a greater spirit of adventure than the British soldier. He does not want to serve at home and he likes foreign service. I found great envy of our North Western Frontier of India; many men told me how they longed for such a place where they could see some service. Their tour of foreign service, however, is much shorter than ours (two years). Their periods of enlistment are for three years only with the opportunity of extending in three year periods up to thirty years, but it is usually only N.C.Os. who extend. Two other factors which affect recruiting are interesting. The cinema has a great effect and several men told me that they had decided to enlist after seeing a good army film. The American

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loves a military film, and I found men who had been four or five times to see films such as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Bengal Lancer* and *Wee Willie Winkle*, to say nothing of their own army films. The other factor is that of allowing the public in to see their army. In barracks, in camp, on maneuvers and on the ranges, the public are given a hearty welcome and not asked "to move along quietly, please," as they are in England.

It is difficult to express an opinion on American Army discipline after only a short visit. On first sight it appears to British eyes to be somewhat lax. The first impression is that there is too much discipline amongst the officers and not enough amongst the men. The former may be true, but the latter is more questionable. "Guards" discipline has been tried and has failed. The American will not stand for it. In their present discipline they aim at inculcating the requisite habit of cheerful obedience to orders without destroying a man's initiative. They realize the necessity for obedience but hate the automaton who cannot think or act for himself. After only a three weeks' peace attachment it is difficult to express an opinion on the result attained, and the only opinion offered is that they manage to retain the individuality of the man, who is freer than the British soldier, particularly when off parade, but possibly rather at the price of the great corporate spirit and esprit de corps of the British soldier. We want more of the former without losing the latter, whereas the American could probably do with more of the latter without necessarily losing any of the former.

The N.C.Os. are usually long service men who are making the army their profession, and they are a first class lot. It is curious to find therefore that they are allowed less responsibility than

British N.C.Os. Many routine or technical duties which are normally done entirely and most efficiently by N.C.Os, in the British Army are considered to be beyond the scope of what an N.C.O. can be trusted to do. The result is that the officer tends to waste his time on trivialities, with detriment to his study of the higher branches of his profession, whereas the N.C.O. has little opportunity to express his individuality and power of command in training and leadership. Several N.C.Os. who had visited Canada told me this and expressed the wish that they had the same responsibility as British N.C.Os. They were also extremely envious of British sergeants' messes, of which they have no counterpart. The men are well turned out but their present service uniform is unsuitable for life in a mechanised or motorized formation. It will probably be eventually changed for a smart blue patrol type of uniform for dress parades and walking out, with a more suitable type of fatigue dress for ordinary work in the field. There are the usual rounds of inspections such as we know so well, but less attention is paid to outward appearance. Their system of periodical maintenance checks and inspections is excellent. The twin Gods of "Spit and Polish" receive certain essential courtesies but not the reverent homage of the British Army. Vehicles and equipment are therefore less beautiful to the eye but equally serviceable for war.

THE LIGHT FIELD BATTERY

An American "75" or light field battery is commanded by a captain and is a smaller unit than the British battery. When up to strength it has only three other officers. It is on a four gun basis, with a smaller battery staff and very small administrative responsibilities.

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The gun is the French 75 mounted on a split trail American carriage which has several interesting features, such as a central jack from which the gun is normally fired. This jack gives a three point suspension with an equal strain on both trails on uneven ground. It is a beautifully mounted gun and as steady as a rock when firing. The "prime-mover" is a 30-cwt. truck with four wheel (front and rear) drive; this form of drive is considered much superior to the six wheeler with its drive on the four rear wheels. The rear wheels push the front over an obstacle, and the front then pull the rear wheels out. The truck certainly has a first class cross country performance; when tracks are fitted, which is not often necessary, it can pull a gun out of almost all conditions of mud, frost and snow. The battery staff are at present carried in trucks or station vans similar to those now often used in England. The latter have a poor cross country performance, and will probably be replaced by trucks. The wire truck contains a wire reel operated by a small one-half horsepower petrol engine for reeling in; this is an extremely useful gadget as it can be easily transferred to any truck. A battery carries 6 miles of cable; communication from the O.P. to the battery is by line, lamp or flag. There is no wireless inside the battery. Neither are there any motor cycles in the battery which seems a mistake, as a station van, with a poor cross country performance or a 30 cwt. truck has to be used for the smallest intercommunication task.

The firing battery consists of its four gun trucks, with four ammunition trucks and one truck for gun fitters and spare parts. The aim is to have 200 r.p.g. in the firing battery, but the actual amounts in number and type do not appear to have been definitely settled yet. Shrapnel is dying a hard death but it is probably

moribund and it is likely that a 75mm. gun-howitzer will eventually replace the 75mm. gun. There is finally a maintenance section with trucks for rations, water, blankets, petrol and spare parts. It also contains two "pick ups" for general purposes. These "pick ups" are similar to station vans except that they have a carrying instead of a passenger type of body. They are of inestimable value as "odd job" vehicles. The mobility of these motorized batteries is very high. A regiment of field artillery thinks nothing of doing 250 to 300 miles a day: it can, and does, average 200 miles a day for a fortnight. Its cross country performance is at present limited by its station vans, but if it is eventually equipped entirely with trucks, this will also be extremely high.

THE BATTALION

A battalion contains three batteries and, as in the French and German organization, is the real tactical fire unit. Batteries can, and do, act independently at times, but the battalion is, in effect, normally a twelve gun battery, dispersed in packets of four guns. These are normally close together in action and are controlled from the battalion O.P. The battalion commander has to assist him a staff, a headquarters battery and a battalion combat train for ammunition supply. The battalion commander's staff consists of an executive officer (second-in-command): an administrative officer (adjutant); one intelligence and one operations officer who are responsible for fire control; a supply officer, a communications officer, two liaison officers and one reconnaissance officer (survey officer).

The H.Q. battery is commanded by the communications officer and contains:—one wire section, one radio

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section, two liaison sections, and one reconnaissance section.

The radio section is normally used for communication to the infantry and artillery regiments and to the air, though it is sometimes used for communication to batteries; it contains six wireless sets. The two liaison sections have wire and wireless and are communication sections for the two liaison officers. The reconnaissance section contains the survey and fire control personnel.

RECONNAISSANCE AND OCCUPATION OF POSITIONS

The battalion commander makes his reconnaissance, usually taking with him his second in command, communications officer, reconnaissance officer and such of the remainder of his staff as he may require. He leaves the bulk of his staff at a convenient place in rear if the tactical situation does not permit of a larger party. He selects the area, or in some cases, the actual gun positions first and then his O.Ps. He has meanwhile ordered his battery commanders to a convenient rendezvous where he issues orders.

The battery commander usually takes forward one or two of his battery staff vans, giving a forward rendezvous to the remainder of his staff. He leaves his G.P.O.* back with the guns. He reconnoiters and selects both his O.P. and battery position, trying to have communications established by the time the battery arrives. He leaves one man to mark the battery position. An N.C.O. (the scout corporal) is sent back with orders to the G.P.O., who brings the battery into action. The battery sergeant-major then collects all vehicles and takes them back to the wagon lines.

The procedure for advances and withdrawals is similar to our own, but in

every case the G.P.O. is always left with the guns. In a quick action, there are no preparations, other than signals, at the battery end before the arrival of the guns and time is undoubtedly lost by not adopting our system of taking the G.P.O. forward and allowing him to select his own position and make all preliminary preparations before the arrival of the battery. In fact, all through American organisation and procedure there seems to be a disinclination to decentralise to subordinates. Each rank seems to try and do half of what could and should be done by the next rank below. This is strange amongst a people whose individuality and initiative are not only highly developed but greatly prized. When a more leisured occupation of position is possible, the reconnaissance officer carries out the preliminary plans, preparations and survey. He does all the fire control work from the O.P. where he is in charge of all the specialists. He shoots the battery if the battery commander is away with the infantry commander.

SHOOTING

With the battalion organisation of three four-gun batteries, a great deal of the shooting that is done by the British battery commander, is carried out by the battalion commander. For instance, as soon as the batteries are in action, he will normally shoot each one in on the same base point (Zero point). In a quick mobile action, the fire control personnel will plot this base point in on a board, draw an arbitrary north and south line through it and then plot the battery positions from the line and range at which they hit the base point. Any succeeding targets it is desired to engage are then registered by one battery; the line and range from the other batteries is computed and they can shoot without registration. This method,

*Battery executive.—*The Editor*.

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which is very quick and accurate, has no relation to the real co-ordinates and is entirely separate from the fire chart (or surveyed map board) which is built up, when time permits, by similar survey methods and organisation to our own. The targets plotted in after firing on this rough system can be corrected for conditions of the moment and transferred to the surveyed board, if required, by reference from the base point.

The American G.P.Os. union is evidently a good deal stronger than its British counterpart for, whether the shooting is done at the battalion or the battery O.P. all calculations are made at the O.P. The most intricate calculations are done here and it is amusing to see young officers, whether regular or reserve, tying themselves up with abstruse calculations on the backs of envelopes. The G.P.O. meanwhile sticks to his guns and remains, as formerly in the British Army, a gentleman of leisure. The standard of shooting, however, is high and though the drill appears somewhat lackadaisical to a British gunner, the shells hit the target and hit it quickly. The signalling, particularly the telephony, also appears distinctly casual, but again it produces the results and who is to say which is the more suitable war cry—the snappy British "Shot one" or the laconic American "On the way"! On the whole the systems of gunnery and of predicted shooting are very similar to our own, except that the battalion is usually shot as a twelve-gun battery and the mill system is used instead of degrees and minutes. The mill system is very simple and its advantages over degrees and minutes seem so overwhelming that it is surprising that we have never adopted it.

Annual practice is done under regimental arrangements at a local practice camp, which each regiment seems to possess. At Fort Ethan Allen, the

ranges were limited in size and gave little scope for tactical manœuvre and they were little more than a shooting gallery. Battery positions were all known and numbered: in fact they have to be, for when firing H.E., gun detachments have to take cover behind splinter proof shelters. This is due to a number of prematures from bad ammunition left over from the war, but it slows down drill and must have a certain effect on the morale of detachments when they go to war. In addition to firing their own practice, regular batteries do a good deal of shooting for reserve officers. For the latter, a great saving in expense on ammunition is effected by fixing a 37mm. infantry gun on to the 75 piece. This small shell gives excellent results for gunnery purposes up to a range of about 3,500 yards. Batteries seem to be out in camp for a great deal of the summer and to get a great deal more shooting practice than British batteries. The standard they achieve is certainly very high.

THE REGIMENT AND BRIGADE

A regiment of light field artillery at present contains only two battalions. It is commanded by a colonel and is more an administrative than a tactical unit. It is, however, provided with an ample staff, which enables it to centralise and control fire when required. It also has a service battery which is the main administrative element in the regiment and this unit relieves battalions and batteries of all but the essentially internal administrative matters. Above the regiment is the brigade, which is the highest subdivision of artillery in the American Army and which corresponds to our divisional artillery. This brigade at present consists of one medium regiment of three battalions and two light regiments. The whole higher organisation of artillery is however

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under consideration and will probably be changed as a result of experiments which are being carried out this year with a new and smaller division. In the experimental establishment for this division, the artillery brigade is abolished and replaced by a larger mixed artillery regiment of four battalions. This, however, reduces the gun power to a dangerously low level and is unlikely to come through unchanged. The basis for any organisation, however, is the battalion of three batteries, and this is unlikely to be changed.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, manœuvres did not start

until later in the autumn and I was therefore unable to see them. In fact, my only complaint is that I could not stay longer as it was one of the most enjoyable holidays I have ever spent. In three weeks, it is possible to get but impressions of a country but my feelings towards America, her people and her army are extremely warm ones. Especially are they warm towards a wonderful commanding officer who set the hall mark to one of the happiest and most efficient units which I have ever had the pleasure of meeting, and to his charming wife whose kindness and hospitality did so much to make my visit such a happy one.

A Note from the Panama Packers



Previously published accounts in this Journal of the variations of the traditional caisson ride for the bride and groom adopted for use in truck-drawn and pack artillery have perhaps failed to indicate both the enthusiasm and the rigor of such experiences. Let this picture of Lieut. and Mrs. Rudolph Laskowky's initiation into the fold of married couples of the First Battalion Second Field Artillery (Pack) at Fort Clayton, C. Z., last December 23d be more instructive with respect thereto.

"Illustrating that neither mud nor grades deter us in our work or play," is the accompanying note from Lieutenant Colonel G. H. Francke, the battalion commander.

Lieut. H. J. Lemly (who passed this test last June) recently coached the battalion track team to first place in the Post track meet against the four battalions of the 33d Infantry, 55 points to nearest competitor's 39 1/3.